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A Book of Emblems: The Emblematum Liber in Latin and English

Andrea Alciati

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Andrea Alciatis' Liber Emblemata (published in 1534) was an illustrated book of emblems, used by the well-educated of post-medieval Europe. Each emblem consisted of a motto or proverb, an illustration, and a short explanation; many had heraldic significance. In its time, the Liber Emblemata was an essential part of the library of every writer and artist. Scholars depended on it to interpret contemporary art and literature, while artists and writers turned to it to invest their work with an understood moral significance. This is the English translation of that important work, complete with the Latin texts and illustrations belonging to each of the 212 emblems, following the canonical order established by Johann Thuilius in 1612. The study of emblems reveals the reason statues of lions are traditionally placed before banks, the underlying political message beneath innumerable royal equestrian portraits of the Baroque era, and the connection between the unstable political situation referenced in Holbein's The Ambassadors and Alciati's tenth emblem, a lute with a broken string. translations; bracketed words and phrases represent once-understood references that may be missed by the modern reader. Each emblem is illustrated by an original woodcut. The work also includes the suppressed emblem, once removed due to its offensive subject matter, accompanied by a translation of the seventeenth-century commentary on the emblem by Johann Thuilius. An introduction establishes the importance of the work and its cultural contexts and artistic applications.

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